

What Are the Risks If I Live Near a Meth Lab?

Meth Fact Sheet

Meth causes health problems not just for the users, but also for others who are exposed to the chemicals by living in or near a former meth lab.

The risk of injury from chemical exposure depends on the chemical itself, the concentration, the quantity, and the length and route of exposure. Chemicals may enter the body by being breathed, eaten, injected (by a contaminated needle or accidental skin prick), or absorbed by the skin.

Acute Exposure: An acute chemical exposure is one that occurs over a relatively short period of time and may result in health effects. An acute exposure to high levels of contaminants found in meth labs cause shortness of breath, cough, chest pain, dizziness, lack of coordination, chemical irritation, lesions and burns to the skin, eyes, mouth and nose, and in severe cases, death. Acute reactions of this nature could occur during or immediately after a drug bust, before the lab has been ventilated.

Less severe symptoms resulting from a less acute exposure cause headache, nausea, dizziness, and fatigue or lethargy. These symptoms have been known to occur in people who have entered a drug lab after the bust has been completed, but before the property has been adequately cleaned and ventilated. These symptoms usually go away after several hours.

Corrosive Effects: Inhalation or skin exposure may result in injury from corrosive substances present in a meth lab. Symptoms range from shortness of breath, cough, chest pain, to burns to the skin.

Solvents: Exposure to solvents can irritate the skin, mucous membranes, respiratory tract, and cause central nervous system effects. They are also dangerous because of their fire and explosive properties.

Chronic Exposure: Chronic exposure occurs over an extended period of time, such as weeks, months, or years. A chronic health effect is one that usually appears after a lengthy period of time, possibly years. Not much is known about the chronic health effects from these labs. However, there is scientific evidence from animal and human toxicity studies that shows the chemicals used to manufacture meth can cause a range of health effects include cancer, damage to the brain, liver and kidneys, birth defects, and reproductive problems, such as miscarriages.

***** If you suspect a dwelling or property may be an illegal lab, contact your local police, or sheriff's department. If it's an emergency, call 911.** Do not enter a site that you think may have been used for cooking meth. Meth labs present extreme dangers from explosions and exposure to hazardous chemicals. Breathing the fumes and handling substances can cause injury and even death. Meth labs are considered hazardous waste sites and should only be entered by trained and equipped emergency-response professionals.

Want to know how to identify a meth lab? Read the **WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF A METH LAB?** fact sheet